

Dean Griffin Day Talk

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Dr. G.P. “Bud” Peterson

President, Georgia Institute of Technology

(As written; not necessarily as delivered)

Thank you Dr. Weinsheimer, for that overview of the “Thank a Teacher Program.” And I would like to extend a special thanks to Zack and all of the Ambassadors, for your work in coordinating Dean Griffin Day.

Marilyn Somers will talk specifically about the legacy of Dean Griffin but I do want to point out a couple of things.

He wore many hats—he was a math instructor. Throughout his Georgia Tech career, he coached about four sports, served as placement director, and was an emergency loan officer for students. He later coordinated religious affairs, the YMCA, the infirmary and was a director of student health. He was a team player, willing to do just about anything Georgia Tech asked him to do.

But he was best known for his passion for students, and would do anything he could to help them succeed. If he had just invested in programs, we probably wouldn’t be celebrating him today. His real legacy is about the people he touched, and specifically, students.

Faculty and staff here today have that same passion for students. This fall we had the largest student enrollment in Georgia Tech’s history—20,000. Those of you who we are celebrating today are here because you don’t see 20,000. You see individuals.

You have been nominated by students and selected by ambassadors because you care, you’re willing to go the extra mile, and you have a passion for teaching and helping students get everything they need to succeed.

I looked over excerpts from some of the student letters. Let me share a couple of lines from several of them:

A student in INTA 1110 wrote to Fei Ling Wang: “I feel I have a better understanding of international affairs overall, so much so that the news I see on TV or read about in newspapers now seems more meaningful. Thank you for making this class an engaging, interesting experience.”

To Lawrence Keller from a student in Legal Aspects of Business: “Thank you for being so enthusiastic and engaging.”

To Paige Hoffman from a student in Math 1502: “I’m only a freshman, but I’ve had enough TAs to know the difference between one who does the minimum and one who has a rigorous understanding of the material and who really wants to help students. Thank you for your prompt responses to e-mail, your detailed explanations of problems in class, and your willingness to answer questions—in short, your obvious effort.”

To Raghu Pucha from a student in Mechanical Engineering 1770: “I want to thank you for reminding me that school is not all about the grades, but about the experience and the learning I get from it. I will always remember some simple, yet important advice you told me: figure out what I want to do, figure out what it takes, and do it. You have encouraged me to know that I

am capable of succeeding at Tech. Thank you for encouraging me to find my passion and work for it.”

Is Raghu here today? Get ready. Every ME student will now be signing up for your course. People like Raghu are leaders. You are making a worthy investment in the future: the future of Georgia Tech, and the future of these students. You are giving them a passion for learning. Many of you are helping students prepare to work in teams and solve some of society’s most complex problems. And, you’re helping to prepare them to and serve as leaders and mentors where they will live and work.

As you know, the Georgia Tech community has come together this year to develop a strategic plan to take our Institute to the year 2035. In fact, we’re almost finished with a version of the plan that we will begin to share in the coming weeks.

An integral part of our vision is to become the learning destination for world-class students, faculty, staff and strategic partners. We want to enrich faculty-student collaboration, and enable collaboration among diverse learners across the world. We want to innovate in instruction methods, course design and curricula. We plan to offer greater rewards for effective and innovative teaching, and create opportunities for more faculty-student interactions.

Some possibilities are expanding living/learning communities that bring faculty and students together in informal settings, developing new approaches to engaging undergraduates in research activities, and ensuring a culture where faculty support and celebrate student success.

The faculty and staff who are here today are already doing that. On behalf of Georgia Tech, I want to thank you for focusing on our students. You are helping to create an environment where they can succeed, and then you are celebrating their success. Keep up the good work. You are leaving a legacy.